

## Patient Diagnosis Resource for MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

### Your Diagnosis

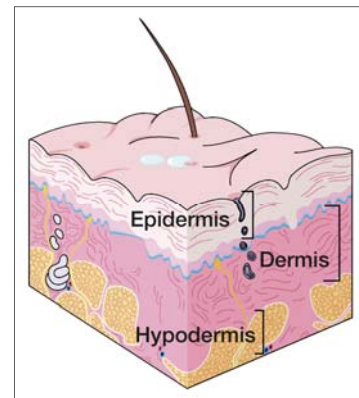
Your doctor has determined that you have molluscum contagiosum, a common skin disease caused by a virus that is highly contagious. Although anyone can develop the infection, children tend to get it more frequently than adults, who have often built up immunity to the molluscum contagiosum virus.

### About the Condition

The skin is the largest organ of the body. Its top layer is the epidermis, which provides protection against the environment. The second layer of the skin is the dermis, which supplies blood, oxygen, strength and support. Underneath the dermis is the hypodermis, or subcutaneous fat layer, which provides an ongoing blood supply to the dermis.

Molluscum contagiosum occurs when the molluscum contagiosum virus enters the skin through small breaks in the hair follicles and causes bumpy growths, or papules, to form in the upper skin layers. The papules:

- ◆ Are small, pearl-like and often indented in the center
- ◆ Usually appear flesh-toned, but are sometimes red and inflamed
- ◆ Occur alone or, most often, in a group on one or two areas of the body
- ◆ Are generally painless, but may sometimes itch
- ◆ Usually range in size from 1/10 of an inch to nearly that of a pencil eraser



Molluscum contagiosum is easily spread to other parts of the body by scratching, which often causes papules to form in a line or cluster. It is also easily spread to other people through skin-to-skin contact.

Papules are frequently seen on the face, neck, torso, arms and legs, but may occur elsewhere on the body such as the eyelids or genital area. In people who have weakened immune systems, the papules can be widespread and even disfiguring.

Complications of molluscum contagiosum may include the persistence, spread or recurrence of papules, as well as secondary bacterial skin infections.

### Treatment Options

Deciding on a treatment plan for your molluscum contagiosum can depend upon a variety of factors such as the location of papules and your age, general health condition and personal preferences.

Sometimes molluscum papules are left untreated in patients with normal immune systems because they usually go away on their own after several months. Most of the time, however, they are removed by a doctor to prevent spreading and improve the appearance of the skin, which may be accomplished in one of several ways:

**Cryosurgery** – Cryosurgery uses super-cooled gas to freeze and destroy papules.

**Topical Medication** – Another treatment method is the application of medicated cream directly onto the skin (topically). The drugs most often used are retinoid creams or gels, immune modifiers and antiviral medications.

**Curettage** – This procedure uses a curette (sharp scooping instrument) to scrape off papules.

**Electrocautery** – In electrocautery, an electrified needle is used to destroy molluscum papules.

**Laser Therapy** – Sometimes a high-intensity light, or laser, is used to treat molluscum contagiosum.

**Chemical Peeling** – This method destroys papules by using a chemical agent applied to the skin.

New topical antiviral medications to treat molluscum contagiosum may be developed in the future, providing further options for treatment.

## **What You Can Do**

To make sure that you do not spread the molluscum contagiosum infection to other parts of your body or to other people, you should take the following steps:

- ◆ Avoid scratching or touching papules by putting tape or a bandage over them
- ◆ Keep areas of skin where papules were treated clean and protected
- ◆ Do not shave any parts of your body where you have papules
- ◆ Avoid contact sports and using swimming pools
- ◆ Do not share baths or towels with anyone
- ◆ Avoid sexual activity if you have papules on the genital region

Also, be sure to tell your doctor if your papules persist or spread, or if any new symptoms arise.

## **Additional Resources**

American Academy of Dermatology, 888.462.3376, [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)

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